

# **WRITTEN COMPOSITION**

Rubrics and Sample Responses

Write an essay about a time you made an important choice.

The information in the box below will help you remember what you should think about when you write your composition.

**REMEMBER—YOU SHOULD**

- ☐ write about the assigned topic
- ☐ make your writing thoughtful and interesting
- ☐ make sure that each sentence you write contributes to your composition as a whole
- ☐ make sure that your ideas are clear and easy for the reader to follow
- ☐ write about your ideas in depth so that the reader is able to develop a good understanding of what you are saying
- ☐ proofread your writing to correct errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure

The names of individuals mentioned in the compositions have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the students whose responses appear in this guide.

## SCORE POINT 1

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS AN INEFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

### *Focus and Coherence*

- ☐ Individual paragraphs and/or the composition as a whole are not focused. The writer may shift abruptly from idea to idea, making it difficult for the reader to understand how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- ☐ The composition as a whole has little, or no, sense of completeness. The introduction and conclusion, if present, may be perfunctory.
- ☐ A substantial amount of writing may be extraneous because it does not contribute to the development or quality of the composition. In some cases, the composition overall may be only weakly connected to the prompt.

### *Organization*

- ☐ The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and/or paragraph to paragraph is not logical. Sometimes weak progression results from an absence of transitions or from the use of transitions that do not make sense. At other times, the progression of thought is simply not evident, even if appropriate transitions are included.
- ☐ An organizational strategy is not evident. The writer may present ideas in a random or haphazard way, making the composition difficult to follow.
- ☐ Wordiness and/or repetition may stall the progression of ideas.

### *Development of Ideas*

- ☐ The writer presents one or more ideas but provides little or no development of those ideas.
- ☐ The writer presents one or more ideas and attempts to develop them. However, this development is so general or vague that it prevents the reader from understanding the writer's ideas.
- ☐ The writer presents only a plot summary of a published piece of writing, a movie, or a television show.
- ☐ The writer omits information, which creates significant gaps between ideas. These gaps prevent the reader from clearly understanding those ideas.

### *Voice*

- ☐ The writer does not engage the reader, therefore failing to establish a connection.
- ☐ There may be little or no sense of the writer's individual voice. The composition does not sound authentic or original. The writer is unable to express his/her individuality or unique perspective.

### *Conventions*

- ☐ There is little or no evidence in the composition that the writer can correctly apply the conventions of the English language. Severe and/or frequent errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure may cause the writing to be unclear or difficult to read. These errors weaken the composition by causing an overall lack of fluency.
- ☐ The writer may misuse or omit words and phrases and may frequently write awkward sentences. These weaknesses interfere with the effective communication of ideas.

I have made many important choices in my life. Everyday when I wake up I make a choice to come to school, which I think is important. It determines your future. You don't have to come to school. Yeah you could get truancy, but you still could make the choice to pay and not go.

Another important choice I make is to not do drugs. Many people do them and they are everywhere. But when people ask you to do them just say no!

Also when your parents get a divorce. Now that's an important but hard decision. Who are you gonna live with? You wanna live with your dad, your mom's hurt. You wanna live with your mom, your dad's hurt. So it's a loose loose situation. You've now heard my important choices. I hope they help you.

**Score Point: 1**

This ineffective composition lacks focus beyond a restatement of the prompt in a perfunctory introduction (I have made many important choices in my life). The writer then attempts to describe three examples of important choices (coming to school, not doing drugs, choosing which parent to live with after a divorce). However, the absence of connections between these ideas causes the response to lack coherence. In addition, the development of these ideas is vague and general, leaving the reader with little understanding of why these are important choices.

Writing Guide papers are labeled WG-1 through WG-16.

When I made an important choice in my life was when I got into running my life use to be complicated I never had anything to do everything was boring. I got in Cross Country and Track because they convince me too I never liked to run I hated it but years passed and I got better and better. when I was a freshmen meaning when I was a ninth grader I was good but not to good to be in the varsity team. Being in the varsity team is something that anyone will want I always wanted to be in that team. So the girls had made is to Regionals and the found out that one of the girls couldn't run something about a problem so they put me to run in Regionals with the varsity team I couldn't believe it cause I went to Regionals and state and that was so important to me because I ran and it was the best choice I ever made for me to say yes to my coach that I will run for him going to regionals and state is something really big you

complete with the best but I made a choice and since that day on I have been running varsity I am glad I made that choice to run with the team if it wasn't for that I wouldn't be as fast as I am know so that was the important choice I ever made.

**Score Point: 1**

This composition is focused on the merits of running track and making the varsity team. The progression of thought is stalled by repetition (so they put me to run in regionals, I went to regionals, going to regionals) and wordiness (When I was a freshman meaning when I was a ninth grader). Although there is some superficial development, the frequent absence of sentence boundaries causes an overall lack of fluency and interferes with the effective communication of ideas.

Life is full of opportunities. As life continues, we go through many obstacles to face and choices to make. Everyone makes choices everyday. Whether it's what to wear, what to do, or what to accomplish in our daily lives. Choices are very important in life, they take you through many paths.

One important choice I've made already is what I would like to be when I grow up. Some of my options were a teacher, a cartoonist, or a singer. After thinking about it for a few weeks, I've decided I want to be a cartoonist because that's what I like to do best, draw.

A second choice I've made is to keep up in school work and do whatever it takes to reach my career.

Of course, in order to become a cartoonist I have to go to college, which is another option I've chosen.

Everyone makes choices to become better in the future. It's important to make the right choice to be successful.

**Score Point: 1**

In this response the writer discusses the choice to become a cartoonist. In attempting to develop the composition, the writer only briefly mentions what needs to be done to become successful in this chosen field (keep up in school and do whatever it takes to reach my career, to become a cartoonist I have to go to college), providing little or no explanation of these ideas. Although the conventions are mostly appropriate and the essay is focused on the career choice, the overall lack of development makes this composition ineffective.

I've made many important choices in my life. There is one that is the most important. Though, it has to deal with when I dropped out. I'm not saying it was a good choice this was a very bad choice of course. And as you all know nowadays you can't get a good job without your high school diploma at least. Good thing I had finally opened my eyes I got back in school and I do well. It's just the choices you make, if you choose to not go to school and have a family you're going to be struggling to maintain your family. If you finish school and get your diploma you will have a higher rating in successfulness in your life. Better jobs, better cars, just better lifestyle complete. Well that was a choice I made I hope it helps you to make your choice.

**Score Point: 1**

In this ineffective response the writer reflects on the decision to return to school and get a diploma. Although focused on the importance of this choice, the writer only offers a list of reasons (you can't get a good job without your high school diploma; you're going to be struggling to maintain your family; better jobs, better cars, just better lifestyle) with little or no development of these ideas. Frequent conventions errors interfere with the communication of the writer's thoughts, and the perfunctory conclusion adds nothing to this composition.



## SCORE POINT 2

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS A SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

### *Focus and Coherence*

- ☐ Individual paragraphs and/or the composition as a whole are somewhat focused. The writer may shift quickly from idea to idea, but the reader has no difficulty understanding how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- ☐ The composition as a whole has some sense of completeness. The writer includes an introduction and conclusion, but they may be superficial.
- ☐ Some of the writing may be extraneous because it does not contribute to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

### *Organization*

- ☐ The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and/or paragraph to paragraph may not always be smooth or completely logical. Sometimes the writer needs to strengthen the progression by including more meaningful transitions; at other times the writer simply needs to establish a clearer link between ideas.
- ☐ The organizational strategy or strategies the writer chooses do not enable the writer to present ideas effectively.
- ☐ Some wordiness and/or repetition may be evident, but these weaknesses do not completely stall the progression of ideas.

### *Development of Ideas*

- ☐ The writer attempts to develop the composition by listing ideas or briefly explaining them. In both of these cases, the development remains superficial, limiting the reader's understanding and appreciation of the writer's ideas.
- ☐ The writer presents one or more ideas and attempts to develop them. However, there is little evidence of depth of thinking because this development may be somewhat general, inconsistent, or contrived.
- ☐ The writer may omit small pieces of information that create minor gaps between ideas. However, these gaps do not prevent the reader from understanding those ideas.

### *Voice*

- ☐ There may be moments when the writer engages the reader but fails to sustain the connection.
- ☐ Individual paragraphs or sections of the composition may sound authentic or original, but the writer has difficulty expressing his/her individuality or unique perspective.

### *Conventions*

- ☐ Errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure throughout the composition may indicate a limited control of conventions. Although these errors do not cause the writing to be unclear, they weaken the overall fluency of the composition.
- ☐ The writer may include some simple or inaccurate words and phrases and may write some awkward sentences. These weaknesses limit the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

In life we are all given various choices. Some choices are easy to make where others are very difficult and take a lot of time to think them through. In my life I have made a lot of choices that have made me who I am and will continue to make me into what I'm going to be. One of the most important choices I have ever made was the choice I made this morning. I decided to come to school.

School is very important to me and I make the tough decision of sleeping in or coming to school. Every morning I make this decision and come to school. School is my life and I have to go to school because I plan to graduate and go to college. I plan to become a doctor one day and to do so I need a lot of schooling. I need to stay focused on schooling and nothing else.

Some students just come to school because they are forced to by their parents, but going to school is a decision that only you can make. Anyone who has ever made something of their lives has gone through schooling to do so. It is one of the main necessities of life in my opinion. Some people that go

to school just breeze through it like it is no big deal, but what they don't realize is that it is probably the biggest decision they could ever make.

Going to school probably isn't the biggest choice we are given in life but it will make us who we are. Going to school and particularly college can expose you to a whole new meaning of life and open up doors to a new world. This is why I choose to continue to go to school.

**Score Point: 2**

In this philosophical composition the writer focuses on the theme that deciding to come to school is one of life's most important choices. The writer discusses the reasons why this is important (go to college...to become a doctor, [make] something of their lives, expose you to a whole new meaning of life) but offers only superficial explanations of these reasons. Repetition (school is very important, school is my life, stay focused on schooling), as well as progression of thought that is not always smooth, prevents the composition from being more than somewhat effective.

It was on a cold day of December I was with my mom at the kitchen just when the rings... it was my aunt JOANNE. She told my mom that she wanted to have a party today, so they hung up. My mother said "You not going to that party you wanted to go", I told her "mom, yes I can." "I can go for like an hour or less." she didn't say anything. "Come on mom, this is an important decision, because if I don't go my friends would not probably talk ever again to me." "You not going" said my mom. "Fine" I told my mom real angry. "Fine" she told me back and I left to my room. So this was my time to make my choice escape thru the window and go to the party or stay here and go my aunt's party. I made a decision. I would go to my aunt's party because I knew that if I would go to my friends party my mom would get all angry with me and I thought that "It would be better to have some friends mad at you when they will eventually get over it and talk again with you, than get your mother angry which was the only person

she would ever understand you , take care of you and always would love you like no other friend you could ever have . " At the end my mom told me " Do you still want to go to that party . " I told her " No mom , I would rather stay with you and my family , than go to other parties where you will not go . " I love you mom " I told her . " I love you son " she replied .

**Score Point: 2**

The writer uses dialogue to describe the choice between going to a friend's party or his aunt's party. The essay progresses through time, and the development, while superficial, allows the reader some insight into the writer's thoughts leading to his decision. Some conventions errors and awkward sentences weaken the overall fluency of the composition but do not cause the writing to be unclear.

The most important choice I have ever made was based on a car. But not just any car a hot, sexy, Fast car. A Camaro, 2002 Z28, top speed 158 mph. Don't ask how I know, I had to make my decision on my birthday when my Father asked me if I wanted it. I thought are you stupid but then he told me that I would have to pay for some of it, three hundred dollars a month or I could have a less expensive car for free. I wanted the Camaro so I got a job at my Father's store. It's an Exxon gas station, not too hard of a job. I take out the trash, stock the cooler, wash the car wash, stock the groceries + ice the beer. Small price to pay for being able to drive that car. When I cruise in that car I feel like a million dollars. I had to give up a little bit of time with my friends. But I still see them on the weekends. Well that's the most important choice I will have to make for a while at least until I get out of high school. Then I will have to decide which college I want to attend.

Score Point: 2

In this somewhat effective response, the writer reflects on his decision to own a Camaro Z28. The essay maintains focus on the price he had to pay for being able to drive that car, in both money and time (three hundred dollars a month, I got a job, I had to give up a little time with my friends). In an attempt to develop the composition, the writer lists job-related tasks (I take out the trash, stock the cooler, wash the car wash...) and only briefly explains the sacrifice of time with his friends. Overall the development remains superficial, preventing the writer from achieving any depth of thought.

Last Summer, I came across a video game called Final Fantasy II. It was a Role playing game online that was very fun and addicting. At the start of Summer I was worried a lot about the changes that were happening in life and I was scared about what was going to happen next year at school.

This Fantasy of living in a world of fun and adventure looked a lot better than reality so I started playing. At first everything was ok. I forgot about my problems and had a lot of fun.

Around August I realized that I had not only forgot about my problems but I forgot about my cares too. I hadn't talked to my family much, I barely spent time with friends and I hadn't even got my permit yet and I was a month away from 16. This game was no longer a fantasy but an addiction. All I wanted to do was play this game and nothing else.

Finally, with the help of my friends and some thinking, I decided to stop playing Final Fantasy or any other addicting games again. This was a key decision in my life

because if I kept going like that it would  
destroy my life. I would be like an alcoholic  
and spend all my time and money to get something  
to just hide my concerns from me and never  
face them.

**Score Point: 2**

The writer of this composition reflects on his key decision to stop playing Final Fantasy or any other addicting games. The progression of thought from the time he started playing through his decision to quit is generally smooth. However, the development remains superficial because the writer only briefly explains the lure of the game in paragraph two, simply lists the results of the addiction in the third paragraph, and concludes abruptly without explaining his thinking or the help given by his friends.



### SCORE POINT 3

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS A GENERALLY EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

#### *Focus and Coherence*

- ☐ Individual paragraphs and the composition as a whole are, for the most part, focused. The writer generally shows the clear relationship between ideas, making few sudden shifts from one idea to the next.
- ☐ The composition as a whole has a sense of completeness. The introduction and conclusion add some depth to the composition.
- ☐ Most of the writing contributes to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

#### *Organization*

- ☐ The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph is generally smooth and controlled. For the most part, transitions are meaningful, and the links between ideas are logical.
- ☐ The organizational strategy or strategies the writer chooses are generally effective.
- ☐ Wordiness and/or repetition, if present, are minor problems that do not stall the progression of ideas.

#### *Development of Ideas*

- ☐ The writer attempts to develop all the ideas included in the composition. Although some ideas may be developed more thoroughly and specifically than others, the development overall reflects some depth of thought, enabling the reader to generally understand and appreciate the writer's ideas.
- ☐ The writer's presentation of some ideas may be thoughtful. There may be little evidence that the writer has been willing to take compositional risks when developing the topic.

#### *Voice*

- ☐ The writer engages the reader and sustains that connection throughout most of the composition.
- ☐ For the most part, the composition sounds authentic and original. The writer is generally able to express his/her individuality or unique perspective.

#### *Conventions*

- ☐ The writer generally demonstrates a good command of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure. Although the writer may make minor errors, they create few disruptions in the fluency of the composition.
- ☐ The words, phrases, and sentence structures the writer uses are generally appropriate and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

Everyone has a fear of something. Sometimes that fear compels us to take actions we wouldn't do in normal circumstances. The actions may lead to success or suffering. My important choice occurred when my cousin endured a venomous snake bite.

In mid June, the sun was ripe with radiant beams. My uncle's cabin lay calmly in the brush of Texas. The river remained calm and the crickets chirped. All was peaceful. My family, my cousin MANDY, and I drove there for the weekend. MANDY was six and had just learned how to swim. Upon arrival I helped unload the van. As I finished, sweat droplets rolled down my face. The humidity was high. MANDY pleaded with my mom to go swimming. I volunteered to tag along.

The cool water felt good against the skin. Hours passed and we did everything from relay races to holding our breathe under water. My mom's voice whistled through the air. The message was vague because it was at least a hundred yards to the cabin. I helped MANDY out of the water to dry off. As we walked along the trail, MANDY stepped on a snake resting in the weeds. The snake's reflexes caused it to bite her. Hastely, I snatched her up and moved her to a safe distance. I kneeled down to examine her.

The snake's fangs pierced the sandals on her feet. MANDY tried to scream but her breathe clogged her throat. Now it came to it, I didn't know what to do, so I froze. My options flowed through my brain; go get help, or bring her to help. Without thinking I carried her to the house shouting as I went. Thankfully, my parents heard my pleas and called for an ambulance.

A few minutes later, MANDY returned to normal with just a bandage on her foot. My choice that day saved her life. That choice will remain forever with me.

**Score Point: 3**

After a meaningful introduction (everyone has a fear of something. Sometimes that fear compels us to take actions), the writer of this composition uses vivid descriptions (sweat droplets rolled down my face, my mother's voice whistled through the air) to add depth and voice to this personal narrative about the events that occurred when a cousin endured a venomous snake bite. Although the conclusion is superficial and there is missing information between the last body paragraph and the conclusion that creates a minor gap, the progression of thought is generally smooth and controlled. The writer also demonstrates a good command of conventions, which contributes to the overall effectiveness of the response.

One important decision that I have had to make was to have a quinceañera. A quinceañera is a special celebration that young Hispanic girls have when they turn 15 years old. It stands for a girl turning into a young woman. I had to consider all the advantages and disadvantages to make this decision.

Some advantages to having a quinceañera is that it is a big celebration with all the quinceañera's family and friends. It's like a birthday party, but it is so much more elegant and special. It is a turning point in a girl's life. Girls wear a big beautiful dress. The girl chooses 14 couples to be in the quinceañera. It is better to have 14 because then there is the quinceañera and her escort which makes 15 couples. The girl also receives many presents and money. In this celebration, the girl makes the party to her liking. She can pick the colors, cake, dress, etc. This day is very important and memorable.

Having a quinceañera has disadvantages, too. The year that my mother started thinking about the quinceañera, was the same year that my grandfather died. She had to go to El Salvador for three months and take care of him. I didn't want to have one because my mom had already spend a lot of money with the funeral and I didn't want her to waste money anymore. Even though this day is full of memories, it is a big waste of money. The

dress, crown, and shoes will probably never be worn again. Also, the hall and church cost money and the money will never be fully returned. All the money that was used could go towards college or a car.

In the end, my aunt convinced my mom to have the quinceañera. I also gave in, but didn't think much of it at first. When the big day came, I was nervous and excited. At the end of the night, I knew I would never forget that day.

**Score Point: 3**

In this generally effective composition, the writer uses an expository strategy to explain the advantages and disadvantages she considered in deciding to have a quinceañera. The ideas presented enable the reader to understand the significance and purpose of a quinceañera, and the use of a personal example (my Mom had already spent a lot of money with the funeral and I didn't want her to waste money anymore) adds to the depth of development. The composition as a whole has a sense of completeness, and the use of conventions is generally appropriate.

Everyone has to make decisions everyday. They range from important life changing decisions to what you want to eat for lunch. Important decisions are more often than not the ones that take the most time and effort. You must weigh the consequences carefully and predict the possible outcomes.

In Helen Peppe's story "Set Free", an 8-year-old boy is trying to decide what to do with a dog that he feels a very close connection to. He feels that when the dog lunges and pulls on its chain, it is trying to get away and be free, similar to the way he feels when he his father hugs him and will not let him go, even when he kicks and tries to pull away. He wants to set the dog free but he is stuck in a state of indecision. On one hand he wants the dog to be happy and free, but on the other hand he is afraid of the consequences. If he lets the dog go it might not have food or shelter, and his father will probably be angry with him. Also, and maybe most importantly he will miss the dog because he considers it a friend and a kindred spirit. He finally makes the decision to set the dog free only to watch it walk into his doghouse

and lay down, content with its living conditions.

I have also had to make important choices like the boy in "Set Free". There is one decision I made that was very similar. I once had a dog named JACKIE who had a bad habit of going down the road and killing my neighbors chickens. We tried to build a fence to keep her in the yard, but she soon learned she could climb it. I didn't want to get rid of her, but I knew keeping her could not turn out good. She would probably end up being shot by my neighbor. So I decided that we would give her away. As it turned out there was a lady in a nearby town who already two Jack Russel Terriers, the same as JACKIE, and lot of space for them to run and be happy. I wanted to keep her but I decided it would be best for JACKIE to go live with the lady in the nearby town.

Important decisions can be hard to make, but all the same they must be made. Even if you decide not to choose, you have still made one, usually not the best one either. The best thing to do is to consider the options, think of the results, and decide what you think is best.

**Score Point: 3**

This generally effective composition explores the theme that important decisions can be hard to make by combining an analysis of the literary selection with a personal anecdote. The writer strongly connects the analysis with the personal anecdote, giving the composition focus and depth of thought. The conventions are generally effective, and the reader is able to understand the writer's unique perspective.

Three years ago and I can still remember the days I would walk into that science room, and there she would be, beautiful her. I can recall the early stages of it. I would occasionally glance at her, beautiful her, amazed at the sight of her. Never before had a girl earned so much of my attention, my interest.

The weeks would go by, and my affections grew. People, caught on, perhaps I was too transparent. She began to crowd my thoughts, and encountering her would often make me embarrassed.

More weeks went by, and my childish affections grew.

But I soon realized the melancholy truth, that she could never return the feelings I had. And yet, I still held on to my childish affections, remaining faithful to them, hoping that one day she might turn around.

Months went by. Those months turned into a year, and that was when it hit me, that was when I finally accepted the fact that nothing was ever to come. How sad it was, to look back and see the foolishness of my childish affections, the ill-fated endurance to await her change of heart. It began to sicken me, disgust me, and I knew that my affections ~~would~~ would only be



hopeless desires, a repetition of the past.  
That was when I made the choice, that was  
when I threw my affections away. No longer would  
I have to suffer, no longer would I have to  
grieve, for my affections could never be  
given again.

She's still there, often do I see her,  
beautiful her. If we should ever cross paths in the  
hallways, our brief encounter is nothing more than  
a silent wave or an awkward hello.

**Score Point: 3**

In this concise and engaging composition, the writer reflects philosophically on a personal experience with unrequited love. The composition progresses smoothly from the writer's first encounter to his final decision to accept the fact that nothing was ever to come of his affections. Although the writer moves quickly, the reflective comments (I still held on to my childish affections; the ill-fated endurance to await her change of heart) adds some depth of thought. The strength of the conventions and engaging voice add to this generally effective response; however, more depth of development would be needed to achieve a higher score point.

## SCORE POINT 4

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

### *Focus and Coherence*

- ☐ Individual paragraphs and the composition as a whole are focused. This sustained focus enables the reader to understand and appreciate how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- ☐ The composition as a whole has a sense of completeness. The introduction and conclusion are meaningful because they add depth to the composition.
- ☐ Most, if not all, of the writing contributes to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

### *Organization*

- ☐ The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph is smooth and controlled. The writer's use of meaningful transitions and the logical movement from idea to idea strengthen this progression.
- ☐ The organizational strategy or strategies the writer chooses enhance the writer's ability to present ideas clearly and effectively.

### *Development of Ideas*

- ☐ The writer's thorough and specific development of each idea creates depth of thought in the composition, enabling the reader to truly understand and appreciate the writer's ideas.
- ☐ The writer's presentation of ideas is thoughtful or insightful. The writer may approach the topic from an unusual perspective, use his/her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing, or make interesting connections between ideas. In all these cases, the writer's willingness to take compositional risks enhances the quality of the content.

### *Voice*

- ☐ The writer engages the reader and sustains this connection throughout the composition.
- ☐ The composition sounds authentic and original. The writer is able to express his/her individuality or unique perspective.

### *Conventions*

- ☐ The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the composition. The writer demonstrates a consistent command of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure. When the writer attempts to communicate complex ideas through sophisticated forms of expression, he/she may make minor errors as a result of these compositional risks. These types of errors do not detract from the overall fluency of the composition.
- ☐ The words, phrases, and sentence structures the writer uses enhance the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

Everyone must face important decisions in their life. They must carefully weigh the pros and cons of each choice and do what they feel is best. They can seek out counsel, but in the end, the decision rests squarely on their own shoulders.

My first encounter with a life-altering decision came when I was 11 years old. My family and I discovered that I had a tumor growing in my right tibia. At first, we were merely concerned, but that changed to a slow sort of confused panic when the doctors here in \_\_\_\_\_ told us that they were 98% positive that I had cancer. There were two options for me: 1) Remain in \_\_\_\_\_ with doctors who were skilled but not specialized in this sort of thing for further testing to make absolutely sure that it either was or was not cancer, or 2) travel to Dallas within the following 2 days to have a risky surgery and labwork with a trained specialist and defer any potential problems that waiting any longer might cause. The doctors and my parents both felt that this decision should be presented to me.

My mind was reeling. Words like chemotherapy, complications, cancer, scalpel, surgery, pain, and soon flashed through my mind. It was a heavy burden they had passed on to me. Eleven year old little boys needn't think about such frightening prospects!

After several hours of worrying, asking for advice, praying, and crying, I made my choice. I was going to Dallas the very next morning.

The next day and a half whirled by at an alarming rate. I was poked, prodded, vaccinated, tested, scanned, connected to thousands of IVs and machines. Finally, the morning of my operation arrived. I was

actually happy when they came in to anesthetize me. For the rest of the day I wouldn't have to be afraid, I wouldn't have to wonder whether I'd made the best choice. That would be decided shortly for me.

When I came to in recovery, I felt satisfied with my choice, since I could see no chemo pump stemming from my heart. I didn't have cancer! My doctors did, however, say that they had never seen a benign tumor double in size (to 6 inches long, 2 inches in diameter) in only a matter of days, and were extremely glad that I had decided to have it removed immediately before any further damage to my bone could be done.

Even though I was faced with a hard choice, I made the right decision. I learned that if I could decide something that would affect my life so deeply, I shouldn't be afraid to make decisions and take risks in order to shape my future.

**Score Point: 4**

In this personal narrative about the life-altering decision to have a risky surgery at the age of eleven, the writer details the emotional and physical travails of the experience. The smooth progression of thought is evident as the writer explains his decision process, the medical procedures, and the final outcome. The strong voice and emotional insight (I was actually happy when they came in to anesthetize me. For the rest of the day I wouldn't have to be afraid) enhance the overall quality of this highly effective composition.

When I was a young girl, my father and I were cleaning up the yard and we had found a baby sparrow. Not only did I not think about the time and attention it would need but also how hard it would be to give it up.

It was a sunny afternoon, and it was my turn to help out my father in the back yard. I went to go get a trash bag and looked at a tree while passing by and noticed something brown and lumpy laying there. Instantly forgetting about the trashbag, I ran to it and knelt. It had a messed up leg. It apparently fell out of the nest in the tree above me. I ran to go get my father and he came quickly, not hesitating at all. We looked around for its mother, but she wasn't there. We checked everyday, she wasn't there. So, we took it into our care.

I fed it, I cleaned it, I played with it, I did everything with it. It soon became my only friend. Every day when I came home, it would sit there with its head perked up at my fabulous stories from school. It became my confidant. Sometimes people just need somebody else just to listen and not say anything or criticize them. That is how I became a good listener. Who would have thought that something so small and something that incapable of speaking could teach me something that will help me for the rest of my life.

Two months later, my father declared that we must give the sparrow up and let it live on its own. I refused to give it up and claimed it as mine because just the other day, it learned to fly. I could feel the joy in my eyes as it flew here to there in my room, proud of its new accomplishment. As it flew around, I got to the point where only I was happy, but what

about the bird? The bird had to be content too. so, I made my decision.

It sat in my cupped hands as I walked to the back yard. With sadness in my eyes, I lunged it gently into the air, getting the bird off to a flying start. I just wanted to walk away, and did. But before I could turn, I saw the bird land. I went to go see where it landed. It landed in its own nest in our tree in our backyard. A sudden surge of bubbly happiness came over me.

With this encounter, even today I believe that if you let something go and it comes back, it's yours. The bird never really left me, though. It would visit me on my window sill everyday and fly off into the sky.

**Score Point: 4**

This engaging, detailed narrative about finding and caring for an injured sparrow explores how something so small could teach the writer about life. The ideas presented are thoughtful and insightful (Sometimes people just need somebody else just to listen and not say anything or criticize them. That's how I became a good listener). The conclusion adds meaning and depth, and the strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the composition.

At our school, "football" and "Friday" are the two most important words we use. Whether it is in a heated rivalry, attending a pep-rally, or physically playing the game, everybody who's anybody is involved in football, and this is where my dilemma begins.

After completing freshman season, and three years of playing football I was left with an important choice. Having football as a class period completed a 7-period day, and this was fine except when you consider college resumes. To graduate from high school with the highest honors, a student is required to take 3 years of a foreign language. To complete my 3 years I had to begin taking a foreign language beginning sophomore year. At the start of freshman basketball season, I began having health problems including extreme asthma. This was an opening for a hard choice. I knew at some point I must relinquish my crown and bow out of sports to pursue my education standards. I was obligated to drop a single class and viewing it not in my best interest to pursue sports scholarships, I chose to drop my athletic period. I talked with my counselor and we came to a decision. In order to take a foreign language I would drop athletics at mid-term and complete the year in choir, a class that I do well at. It's also not bad that my mom happens to be one of the directors. To continue taking this class I would, for the remainder of my high school years, take the required history or geography course through a correspondence course from a college. Though with the added workload at home, this decision was one of the best I've made. My GPA continues to climb through hard work and probable gain back of brain cells lost from long, rough football

practices.

Each Friday night I go to the football game, sit in the stands, and feel a stab of regret that I could be out there. I guess this feeling is part of my decision to have a better life.

I am now beginning to see a solid future unfold before me with a new job where I am not required to say "would you like fries with that." This is the place I want to be in this stage of my life. Despite the hard work and dedication I am required to put into my education in order to retain it, I believe that this choice was the right one.

**Score Point: 4**

The introduction of this highly effective response immediately draws the reader into this writer's personal dilemma—football or academics? Each detail leading to the decision is thoroughly and specifically developed, and the writer's authentic voice adds to the effectiveness of this composition. Insightful comments (My GPA continues to climb through hard work and probable gain back of brain cells lost from long, rough football practices) and a strong conclusion that reflects on the writer's decision add depth of thought.



Birthday parties have always been a pretty big deal in my family. We would go all out, with streamers, confetti, heaps of brightly-colored presents, and a cake piled so high with icing and edible decorations that it was more like a modern art piece than dessert. One particular birthday still stands out in my mind, and even though years have passed since then, I can still see it through the eye of an eight-year-old, soon to be nine. At that age, I truly believed that this party would determine the happiness of the rest of my school career. For many long hours I agonized over the invitations. Two slots were filled immediately, by my best friends STACY and DOUG. But the person I most wanted to be there was the person I was most afraid to ask—MICHAEL, the cutest and most popular guy in the fourth grade, and my first crush. To ask or not to ask? I had to decide, and the dilemma was giving me a headache, backache, stomach ache and heart ache, all at once.

A week before my party, I had filled the roster with various friends, classmates, and kids my mom really liked. And still I was tormented by MICHAEL. I decided to take the dilemma to someone wise, powerful, and well-versed in the ways of the world. I asked my mother. She asked me a question

which I have often asked myself since then when I was worrying about boys. She said "In a worst case scenario, would it be worse to ask him and have him say no, or not ask him and wonder forever what he might have said?" I spent the whole afternoon thinking about what she had said, and by dinner time, I had decided what I had to do. The next day at school, I marched up to MICHAEL, and I boldly said, "Wanna come my party please?" While this was slightly different from the speech I had rehearsed, I thought I did quite well considering my nervousness. Apparently, MICHAEL had gotten the gist of my question because he smiled and said, "Sure." On the day of my party, though, he was violently sick with the flu and couldn't come, and I found I had an incredible time without him. And although today it seems kind of silly that I thought that decision would change the course of my young life, I can look back today and see that it has shaped my feelings toward guys. I can now face the prospect of asking a guy out with only minor hyperventilation, and more often than not the words do come out of my mouth when I'm standing in front of him. So although that decision to ask MICHAEL was a minor one, it has proved to be important to this day.

**Score Point: 4**

The writer of this personal narrative explores her dilemma over whether to invite a boy to her ninth birthday party and the lasting impact of this choice. The descriptive language (a cake piled so high with icing and edible decorations that it was more like a modern art piece than dessert), honest and insightful introspection (I can now face the prospect of asking a guy out with only minor hyperventilation), and humorous perspective combine to create a thoughtful and engaging composition. The smooth and controlled progression of thought and the strength of the conventions contribute to the overall effectiveness of the response.